"KENSINGTON EPISODES"

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Summer in the City: Training Program in Urban Ministry and Parish Partnerships

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I. Introduction

Welcome to St. Luke's Church and the Fairmount Team Ministry in Kensington. Kensington may well be Philadelphia's most historic community. It has been said that the industrial history which is Kensington's has had more of an impact on the lives of Philadelphians and their families than the colonial history with which we are more familiar. At the same time there is no adequate portrait of the people who built and worked in the mills of Kensington. We hope this booklet will help introduce us and our ministries to you.

The Episcopal Church has had and continues to have an important role to play in the lives of the people who live here. It was an Episcopalian, Anthony Palmer, who in 1730 named and founded Kensington. In 1893, an Episcopalian, Esther Kelly, began the work at the Lighthouse Community Center which continues to this day. The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania established the Episcopal Hospital here. And the Episcopal Churches of the Fairmount Team Ministry: St. Luke's, St. Barnabas', St. John's, St. Nathaneal's, and Christ Church and St. Ambrose have continually been houses of prayer where the cries of joy and pain, our aspirations and frustrations, have been heard over the years. More than that these churches have played an active role in deepening the faith and in restoring the lives of their people.

The population of Kensington has been on a sharp decline since 1920 when there were 155,347 people living here. By 1960 that number had dropped to 98,598. The 1980 Census figures for tract 163 which includes St. Barnabas' and St. Luke's Churches show a 33% decline in total population from 1970. Kensington Churches have mirrored the hard times. Though population decline may not be as strong a factor as the prevailing spirit of privatism (see below) for church membership decline. Protestant Church membership declined on the average of 24% from 1950 to 1960. In the Episcopal Church membership dropped from 4700 in 1945 to under 1100 in 1965 to just over 900 in 1979. Only now are we as Churches beginning to grow again.

Several Churches such as St. Simeon's, which once had the largest communicant membership in the Diocese of Pennsylvania, have closed their doors. Others such as Christ Church and St. Ambrose, and Grace Church and the Incarnation are the results of mergers. Two Churches, Good Shepherd and Emmanuel, are yoked together under one priest. Every other Kensington Episcopal Church relies on subsidies from Diocesan "COAC" (Coalition of Aided Congregations) funds in order to carry on the important ministry of this area. Peter Binzen of the Bulletin (a parishioner of St. David's, Radnor) once remarked that what the Kensington factory worker drops into

his church collection plate on Sunday often goes far beyond what many in wealthier parts of the Diocese contribute (2, p. 240). In 1980, for instance, the parish giving of St. Luke's Church increased by 65%. The story of the widow's mite lives on in Kensington.

The spirit in which the city has developed and become what it is today has been characterized as one of privatism. A further development of the spirit of privatism is given in Warner's book, The Private City. For the individual, privatism meant the search for happiness through personal independence and pursuit of wealth. From the from the first the city of Philadelphia was set up as an arena to run the race for private wealth. Its government was to encourage private business. Its society was to be open so that every citizen would have a chance to "win" or "place" in the race for success. The consequences of this private spirit have been to isolate individuals, families, and groups; to ignore and divide the poor; and to enable the advantaged to become more advantaged.

A city oriented toward private pursuits and marked by the consequent division can only be said to "work" in a growth economy with population steadily increasing, resources cheap and available, ever increasing production, and an environment capable of withstanding anything one might throw into it. The primary instrument for development then becomes the national or international corporation leaving the neighborhood and local church as marginal and residual categories. Religion comes to deal more and more with the private sphere of family and leisure time, than with questions of vocation, community, and meaning. Churches in isolation become places where people get patched up only to be thrown back into the mill.

In the pages that follow we will look at the consequences of this private spirit in five episodes of Kensington history. In opposition to privatism, what is necessary for the health of the inner city is community, a willingness to share scarce resources for the good of all, and a willingness to care for all people, not just the "successful" (7, p. x). Privatism works against efforts toward community, sharing, and caring. It is behind the division of poor people, immigrant - Native American, union - non-union, black - white; and the oppression of the poor and powerless seen so vividly in the 1903 march against child labor and in the Irish riot of 1843. Finally, the drive toward community continues and is at the heart of what may be a renewal for our Kensington neighborhoods today. It is interesting to note that as privatism is being battled by an increasing emphasis on community our churches are beginning to grow again.

II. The Nanny Goat Market Riot of 1843

Kensington as a textile center began very early. In 1789, Samuel Slater had one of the first cotton spinning mills in the country here. By 1810, Kensington was turning out 7500 yards of carpets, 39,000 pairs of stockings, 7500 dozen shirts, and 207,000 pounds of spun wool (6, p. 32).

One of the early industries in Kensington was hand loom weaving. Weavers lived in a house with a shed in back for the loom. In the 1840s and 50s it was difficult to converse on the street for all the noise of the hand weaving looms. It took fifteen years to become an accomplished hand weaver, a job that demanded turning out eight to ten yards of cloth a day.

It was a hard life made more so by the depression years of 1837 to 1843. In 1842, the Bank of the United States closed. It was the largest bank in the nation. With the hard times union wages fell and many unions themselves disbanded. Prices for piecework from hand loom weavers dropped and people took what work they could get.

Even worse conditions in Europe drove more and more immigrants to American cities. In 1835, 1,890 immigrants came ashore in Philadelphia. By 1840, the number had more than doubled to 4,079. The greatest number of these were Irish Catholic (7, p. 137-138).

In Kensington, Irish weavers went on strike. Their complaints were the classic grievances of American labor: rates for piecework had been reduced, pay was delayed and given in storekeepers vouchers rather than cash. It was commonly suspected that the employers had made a deal with the storekeepers to get a certain rake-off on everything purchased with the vouchers (7, p.142).

On Tuesday, January 10, 1843, Kensington weavers took to the streets to stop all weaving in the area. An alderman from the Northern Liberties district just south of Kensington swore out a warrant against Thomas Lynch, an Irish strike leader who had broken into several homes to stop the weaving. When Lynch was arrested, the striking weavers beat up the constable. When Sheriff Porter of Philadelphia County returned with a posse of 150 men, he was met by 400 strikers at the Nannygoat Market, located between Second and Cadwallader Streets and fronting on Master Street, where he too was beaten along with two men and a boy who stood by him. Eight men were arrested for the rioting and beatings. A committee of five weavers and five employers was established to discuss the grievances. Rather than draw attention to the need for jobs and fair wages for all the people, this incident found a scapegoat in the Irish Catholic people for the hard times and scarce resources of this depression.

III. The Native American Riots of 1844

Kensington contained one of the city's highest concentrations of both Irish and Native Americans, those born in this country. Unskilled workers faced direct competition from the Irish immigrants. "For the first time in the history of American labor, workingmen's groups began to complain of immigrants driving down their wages" (7, p.138). Native American groups formed calling for the extension of the waiting period for naturalization to 21 years, the restoration of public office to citizens born in the United States, and teaching from the Protestant version of the Bible in public schools.

On Friday night, May 3, 1844, the Native Americans of the Third Ward held a meeting on a vacant lot just one block from the Nannygoat Market. Irish men and boys heckled the speaker until fights broke out and the meeting was brought to an end.

It was resolved to meet again on Monday afternoon at 4 p.m. to express indignation at Friday's "outrage" and to "take the necessary steps to prevent a repetition of it." A rain shower forced this meeting to reassemble under cover of the Nannygoat Market. Fighting broke out at the edge of the crowd. Pistol shots were heard. Stones and bricks were hurled. Sniper fire issued from behind windows and fences. George Shiffler, a boy of eighteen, employed as a morocco dresser, fell first and became the martyr of the ensuing riots. Thirteen others both Irish and Native American were reported killed and many more wounded. Native Americans swarmed into the district to join in the fight. The militia refused to respond to the unrest in sympathy with the Native American mob (7, p.145). Irish families fled the Kensington riot district. In some cases, 30 to 40 households in a row cleared out, many not knowing where they would go to find shelter and safety. Several Roman Catholic Churches were burned. Only on Thursday did the city manage to restore order.

As a response to the riots of the 1840s, the City of Philadelphia moved in 1854 to consolidate all of the twenty-nine jurisdictions of Philadelphia County, including Kensington, into one municipal corporation. The first product of this consolidated government was a large, professional police force. One writer believes that these riots which in part grew out of the conflict surrounding the Bible in public schools, did more than anything else to force the American Catholic hierarchy to start its own separate school system (2, p.91). In any case, the spirit of privatism saw the division of poor person against poor person. It found a useful tool in religious prejudice, with the result that poor Protestants and Catholics both desiring the same things: jobs, education, and a decent wage in cash rather than scrip money, were set one against the other.

IV. Child Labor - "More Schools/Less Hospitals"

In addition to free labor which was available, indentured labor was made use of in Kensington. Indentures of unskilled people usually involved children ranging in age from six to twelve years old. In most every other city indentured servitude ended by the 1830s. In Philadelphia it continued up to the 1870s because of political corruption. Runaways from indentured service were many. Owners would publish advertisements describing the young runaway, offering expenses and often a reward to the finder. Upon completion of an indenture, lasting from seven to twenty one years, a person was given two suits of clothes, one of which was new.

In 1903 children still worked. A child labor law prohibiting anyone under the age of 13 from working and with regulations for those aged 13 to 16 was not being enforced. Mill owners happily hired any child who was big enough to do a job. "Children were easy to control, and they were cheap. Parents whose earnings were so low that an extra two or three dollars a week was a matter of importance sadly sent their children out to work" (1, p. 115-116).

16,000 children were among the 100,000 textile workers who on June 1, "Whitsuntide Monday", went on strike to reduce the working week from 60 to 55 hours. It was one of the largest strikes Philadelphia had ever known. As the strike continued many Kensington families were brought face to face with poverty and starvation. The Ways and Means Committee of the Central Textile Union was making continuous appeals for money, groceries, and provisions to help those in need.

On Wednesday, June 17, 1903, the textile workers led by the children carrying signs which read "More Schools and Less Hospitals", "Fifty Five Hours or Nothing", and "We Want to Go to School", held a silent march from Independence Hall to City Hall. There Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, a noted labor leader, addressed the gathering. Mother Jones, a little old woman in a black bonnet, a powerful speaker with a high falsetto voice, began her address by lifting two boys up onto a table so officials in City Hall could see them. The Inquirer reported that with hands resting affectionately on their heads she said: "One of these little boys has had his tongue taken out by the machinery; the other has had his hand almost severed in the mills. A certain mill owner said the textile workers would soon be forced back to the mills. Let me serve notice on you that it is a dangerous thing to tell labor you are going to force them back to the mills by starvation..... they will not go back until they have secured those five hours for recreation, for education, and for the cause of the women and children, and let me tell you the old Liberty Bell which has been silenced in this twentieth century, will again ring out for the liberty of the toilers."

The next day Mother Jones went to the coal regions to support the miners there. She expected to return on Monday. As the fourth week of the strike opened with no end in sight, to lift their spirits, 1000 striking workers met to embark on an all day picnic at the headquarters of the Executive Committee of the Central Textile Union, Kensington Avenue and "B" Street, where across the street St. Luke's Episcopal Church was under construction. Less than a year later at the consecration of this Church, the Rev. John B. Falkner, D.D. would reflect the labor of the people by expounding in his sermon that passage from Matthew: "Come to me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you" (See Appendix I).

The strikers paraded to Central Park at 5th and Wyoming Streets carrying banners and American flags. By the time they reached the park their number increased to more than 5000. It was doubtful whether Mother Jones would return in time, but she appeared to everyone's surprise and was greeted by a great ovation.

The question of child labor had quieted down in the papers. Mother Jones felt it imperative to keep the issue alive and prod the government to action. As the Liberty Bell was on tour she arrived at the idea of taking the mill children on tour, to march on New York and to Oyster Bay to dramatize the strike and the toil of children before President Roosevelt. She proposed this at a meeting on July 5 at the Labor Lyceum, Second Street above Cambria. And it was from there on Tuesday, July 7, that her rag tag army of 300, 200 of whom were children aged 8 to 11, set out on their twenty-two day journey. They carried many of the same signs that were used on the City Hall silent march.

By the time the textile strikers reached Trenton many for numerous reasons returned home. The group now numbered 52. As they moved on they came to the town of Princeton where Mother Jones was invited to speak to a class on economics. She took James Ashworth, a ten year old boy, with her. James was stooped over like an old man. He had a curved spine from continually carrying bundles of yarn that weighed seventy five pounds. "Here's a textbook on economics," she said, "(this boy) gets three dollars a week and his sister who is fourteen gets six dollars. They work in a carpet factory ten hours a day while the children of the rich are getting their higher education" (3, p.76-77).

On July 23rd, the band of tired textile workers finally arrived in New York City. They held a meeting at Madison Square. The next day they accepted an invitation to Coney Island. In the evening Mother Jones spoke: "We want President Roosevelt to hear the wail of the children who never have a chance to go to school but work eleven and twelve hours a day in the textile mills of Pennsylvania; who weave the carpets that he and you walk upon; and the lace curtains in your windows, and the clothes of the people. Fifty years ago there was a cry against slavery and men gave up

their lives to stop the selling of black children on the block. Today the white child is sold for two dollars a week to the manufacturers. Fifty years ago the black babies were sold C.O.D. Today the white baby is sold on the installment plan" (3, p.80).

Mother Jones never did get to see President Roosevelt. But she and the children made their point in town after town from Philadelphia to New York. The spirit of privatism left bent and crippled children in its wake. Government encouraged private business and ignored violations of the child labor law. As for the children and their chance to win in the race for success, Mother Jones put it this way: "We are told that evry American boy has the chance of being president. I tell you that these little boys... would sell their chance any day for good square meals and a chance to play. These little toilers... have never heard that they have a chance... to become president" (3, p.81).

V. Carl Mackley: The Tragic Division of Union and Non-union Poor

After the stock market crash in 1929, the national economy was in a state of collapse, and nowhere was the impact more severely felt than in industrial Kensington.

Along with economic stagnation came labor trouble and this was especially true in low pay textile industries like full fashioned hosiery.

A bitter strike broke out at H. C. Aberle and Company, A and Lippencott Streets. The Strike had not hurt Aberle much because all the mills in Kensington were working part time and workers from other mills who needed the money badly could be gotten to come in and take the place of the strikers.

Carl Mackley, 22 years old, lived on Howard Street with his parents, a sister and two brothers. He was a member of the hosiery union and on strike at the Aberle Mill.

On the afternoon of March 6, 1930, Mackley and two companions were in the picket line at Aberle when the day shift left the plant. He and his friends got into a fight with four of the workers. The four got into their car and drove off with Mackley and his partners in hot pursuit. The two cars came to a stop at Rising Sun and Roosevelt Boulevards. The four workers fearing for their lives fired their revolvers, they said, to attract the attention of the police. Mackley was killed instantly and his two friends wounded. The four men fled but were later arrested.

Mackley, an obscure hosiery worker in life, became a hero and martyr in death. 3000 people filed through the Mackley's home for the viewing. On Sunday afternoon, March 9, a public funeral was held at McPherson Square attended by a crowd of 35,000. People jammed into the Square spilling over into the adjoining streets, standing on porches and nearby roof tops. Men and boys climbed up into the trees to get a better view. The traffic on Kensington Avenue was almost at a standstill.

The white casket covered with the American flag and a blanket of carnations and lillies was processed to its place in the Square led by three motorcycle police and nearly eighty men and women walking two by two each wearing a white carnation. The band on the platform played the funeral march from Chopin's "B Minor Sonata". At the appropriate time six white pigeons were released from the center of the Square. At the conclusion more than 300 automobiles were in the funeral cortege which went from McPherson Square to Forest Hills Cemetary.

The burial service was conducted by the Rev. Frederick B. Halsey, Rector of St. Ambrose Episcopal Church who in his sermon preached:

"May we whose hearts are touched and stirred by this tragic death keep firmly implanted in our minds the ends of justice and peace; ends not to be attained by violence, discord, and strife, but by seeking to work continually for true spiritual justice, and by following the example of Jesus of Nazareth in bringing his kingdom to be among men of good will."

Edward F. McGrady, a personal representative of William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor, also spoke at the service. The tensest time came at the conclusion of his speech when he asked the throng to raise their right hands and repeat after him the following pledge:

"I hereby solemnly promise that I will continue the struggle against low wages, poverty, and oppression, and that I will not falter nor be intimidated by hired assassins, nor discouraged by a subservient and ofttimes tyrannical judiciary.

"That, if necessary, we too will lay down our lives in order that all those who toil may be delivered from industrial enslavement by the un-American, avaricious industrial despots.

"To all of which I, at the grave of our martyred brother, Carl Mackley, do pledge our most sacred word of honor."

The Aberle Mill had up to this time refused the proposal of Mayor Mackey for reconciliation by an impartial board of arbiters. Instead it pitted poor worker against poor worker, union against non-union. The mill in its private pursuit of production misdirected the struggle from one against poverty to one of poor against poor. Workers were divided against workers desiring the same things -- enough money to live on, decent working conditions, and freedom from poverty. As worker fought against worker with tragic consequence, management washed its hands.

Eventually Mayor Mackey was able to appoint an arbiter, Dr. Jacob Billikopf -- an economist, sociologist, and executive director of the Federation of Jewish Charities, who brought the strike to a settlement. Of the four men arrested, they were indicted for murder. One was found innocent and charges against the other three were dropped. The Carl Mackley Housing Project in Juniata was sponsored by the Full Fashioned Hosiery Workers' Union as a memorial to Mackley and a modern place of residence for hosiery workers' families.

VI. Albert Street and Racial Division

Racial strife has been part of Philadelphia's history for a long time. While Kensingtonians rioted over working conditions, immigrants, and religion, downtown whites battled blacks. In South Philadelphia in 1834, whites wrecked a black church and at least 20 houses occupied by blacks. They killed at least one black man. The city convened what may have been our nation's first officially appointed riot commission composed of fifteen citizens of the city including one man from Kensington "to inquire into the origin and progress of the late riots in Philadelphia, and the means taken to suppress them" (2, p.).

On Saturday, April 20, 1974, Albert Street was the focus of racial tension in Kensington. Two lawyers purchased a house in the 1800 block of Albert Street. They arranged to rent it to a Puerto Rican woman with two children. The rumor spread that a black family had moved in. Six white young adults and nine youths broke into and gutted the house. The windows and doors were knocked into the street. Wiring and plumbing were ripped out. Furniture was burned in the street, racial epithets scrawled on the walls.

A week later on Sunday afternoon, April 28, a prayer vigil was held at the site on Albert Street. About 25 black men and women from all five branches of the Philadelphia NAACP took part in the 15 minute service led by Alphonso Deal, president of the North Philadelphia Action Branch of the NAACP. The benediction at the Vigil was given by the Rev. Theodore Henderson of St. Luke's Episcopal Church. Hundreds of policemen, some on the Huntingdon El Station, others on horseback, and a police helicopter circling over head, covered the area.

A Kensington Coalition of neighborhood groups circulated a leaflet saying, "Dear Neighbor: We know racial tensions exist and we do not want them intensified. Violence can only bring about more violence... Tolerance and learning to live together is the answer. By working together for improvement of all our neighborhoods we can get what we all need and want:

1. An end to abandoned houses and buildings
2. Clean streets, dirty lots turned into parks
3. Good jobs for your youth, not street corner lounging and drugs
4. Recreation opportunities for all age groups
5. Better education and health facilities for all our people."

These wants and desires were common to both whites and blacks. Only by working together could they even begin to be realized. But forces were at work to keep them apart. One white woman from Front Street said at the time: "The politicians try to play us (the whites and blacks) off against one another, too. When I sit down and talk with them (the blacks) they have some of the same problems we do, you know, with the kids and things."

Whites and blacks wanting the same things were divided against one another. The spirit of privatism saw to it that the more "productive" areas of the city were maintained at the expense of our poorer neighborhoods. Racism was and still is a tool of this privatism. It isolates and divides. Part of the white power structure, it is learned early on and used to divert whites from the actual issues. In a real sense, poor whites are its victims as well as blacks.

The gutted house on Albert Street was left abandoned, just one more of the 16% of all housing that is abandoned in our neighborhood.

VII. Kensington Today: "Hope Happens When People Care and Work Together"

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The baby cried as water washed over her head and I pronounced the words: "I baptize you..." For me this is always a joyful time and a strong image of hope here in Kensington. It speaks of a relationship with God, of unity with one another, and of new life.

There are hopeful signs around us. We may be at the beginning of a renewal in our community and church. No doubt the "journey" of renewal will be a long one. Yet the first steps along the way are being taken. People are looking across language and racial lines to see that our desires and needs are much the same. Peace, understanding, safe streets, housing, education, jobs -- these are of concern to all. For all our differences, we find ourselves united to one another by our hopes and needs.

Churches of every denomination are growing again for the first time in years. They represent Spanish and English, Black and White. There is a new spirit among our people.

Many churches can be seen working with community organizations such as the Kensington Joint Action Council (KJAC) or Kensington Action Now (KAN). Franciscans are providing food, clothing, and a place to stay for thousands of people each month who would otherwise be without. The Lighthouse provides strong leadership in our community. Hope begins when people care.

KJAC and KAN have worked to bring community development money into every part of Kensington, into White, Black, and Hispanic neighborhoods. The community is encouraging banks and private corporations to invest in Kensington. A new high school is planned because of the cooperative effort of White, Black, and Hispanic parents. KJAC, representing White, Black, and Puerto Rican neighborhood people, reports success working on crime and safety in all our neighborhoods, and has seen to the establishment of hundreds of more homeowners through an improved city Gift Property Program.

KAN in cooperation with the Aetna Life Insurance Company has begun a community development corporation to rehabilitate houses in our neighborhoods. They have also worked to bring about unlimited Homeowners Insurance through Aetna, and have provided mortgage financing at 11%....

What is at the heart of the positive signs emerging in our community? To me the answer lies in something as simple as baptism. One person is brought into relationship with God and others and with every created thing. More and more people are realizing that

they are part of one another. One is somehow related to the other. Our differences whether of color, language, or culture need not divide us but can make us stronger. We are beginning to see that our problems are common problems, and that by standing together we can do something about them.

We can make a difference. Hope happens where we can believe in ourselves, that we are important, and that what we do matters.

This has not always been the way. For too many years we have neglected this "baptismal" image of relatedness. The values of our community and for that matter even of our nation have been private ones. "I'll do it on my own, thank you." "I'm strong. I don't need help." "I can make it, or at least get by, on my own." Our wants and desires have often been private ones to the exclusion of other people.

The consequences of these "private" values have been to isolate us from one another, to divide us as families, as groups, and as communities. It is now becoming clear that this doesn't work. We have seen families break up as members isolate themselves seeking their own individual wants. We have seen neighborhoods decline while groups stick to themselves, remain isolated, allow themselves to be divided -- Black and White, English and Spanish, Protestant and Catholic.

To the extent that we follow "private" values, seeing one another as unrelated, allowing ourselves to be divided, our community and lives will decline.

On the other hand, should we accept our differences, see in them our strength, acknowledge our relatedness to one another, and work side by side for a better Kensington, then our community will grow in the direction of strength and health.

The choice of hope is to work together, to realize that we need one another, and together to build up our community. The process of renewal is a long one. We won't see the finished result right away. I have tried to point out a few of the signs as we begin. And this is all that hope needs -- a glimpse here and there. Hope doesn't tire but it moves ahead actively awaiting the journey's end.

APPENDIX I

"God's Mansions in Heaven and on Earth"
A Sermon Preached at the Consecration of St. Luke's Church, Kensington, May 1, 1904, by the Rev. John B. Falkner, D.D.

"Where are these homes (God's Mansions)? They stand in every place where the children of God need them! Look, in imagination, over this great city: count the sacred towers and steeples which reach towards Heaven and connect it with earth; listen to their bells and their chimes as the music breaks in upon the turmoil and trouble of the people, with the loving invitation, "Come home, come home -- come to your Father's house and rest!" In the ways of commerce, in the poverty stricken streets, among the abodes of sorrow, even in the midst of the haunts of sin -- everywhere -- God has caused his houses to be built, that whosoever will, may enter them and find an Almighty Father's bosom on which to lean his weary head."

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